GETTING CHRISTMAS DINNER ON A RANCH

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

ONE DECEMBER, while I was out on my ranch, so much work had to be done that it was within a week of Christmas before we were able to take any thought for the Christmas dinner. The winter set in late that year, and there had been comparatively little cold weather, but one day the ice on the river had been sufficiently strong to enable us to haul up a wagonload of flour, with enough salt pork to last through the winter, and a very few tins of canned goods, to be used at special feasts. We had some bushels of potatoes, the heroic victors of a struggle for existence in which the rest of our garden vegetables had succumbed to drought, frost and grasshoppers; and we also had some wild plums and dried elk venison. But we had no fresh meat, and so one day my foreman and I agreed to make a hunt on the morrow.

Accordingly one of the cowboys rode out in the frosty afternoon to fetch in the saddleband from the plateau three miles off, where they were grazing. It was after sunset when he returned.

It was necessary to get to the hunting grounds by sunrise, and it still lacked a couple of hours of dawn when the foreman wakened me as I lay asleep beneath the buffalo robes. Dressing hurriedly and breakfasting on a cup of coffee and some mouthfuls of bread and jerked elk meat, we slipped out to the barn, threw the saddles on the horses, and were off.

The air was bitterly chill; the cold had been severe for two days, so that the river ice would again bear horses. Beneath the light covering of powdery snow we could feel the rough ground like wrinkled iron under the horses' hoofs. There was no moon, but the stars shone beautifully down through the cold, clear air, and our willing horses galloped swiftly across the long bottom on which the ranch house stood, threading their way deftly among the clumps of sagebrush.

A mile off we crossed the river, the ice cracking with noises like pistol shots as our horses picked their way gingerly over it. On the opposite side was a dense jungle of bull-berry bushes, and on breaking through this we found ourselves galloping up a long, winding valley, which led back many miles into the hills. The crannies and little side ravines were filled with brushwood and groves of stunted ash. By this time there was a faint flush of gray in the east, and as we rode silently along we could make out dimly the tracks made by the wild animals as they had passed and repassed in the snow. Several times we dismounted to examine them. A

We Dismounted to Examine Them.

couple of coyotes, possibly frightened by our approach, had trotted and loped up the valley ahead of us, leaving a trail like that of two dogs; the sharper, more delicate footprints of a fox crossed our path; and outside one long patch of brushwood a series of round imprints in the snow betrayed where a bob-cat—as plainsmen term the small lynx—had been lurking around to try to pick up a rabbit or a prairie fowl.

As the dawn reddened, and it became light enough to see objects some little way off, we began to sit erect in our saddles and to scan the hillsides sharply for sight of feeding deer. Hitherto we had seen no deer tracks save inside the bullberry bushes by the river, and we knew that the deer that lived in that impenetrable jungle were cunning whitetails which in such a place could be hunted only by aid of a hound. But just before sunrise we came on three lines of heart-shaped footmarks in the snow, which showed where as many deer had just crossed a little plain ahead of us. They were walking leisurely, and from the lay of the land we believed that we should find them over the ridge, where there was a brush coulee.

Riding to one side of the trail, we topped the little ridge just as the sun flamed up, a burning ball of crimson, beyond the snowy waste at our backs. Almost immediately afterwards my companion leaped from his horse and

Turning to Go Into the Log House.

raised his rifle, and as he pulled the trigger I saw through the twigs of a brush patch on our left the erect, startled head of a young black-tailed doe as she turned to look at us, her great mule-like ears thrown forward. The ball broke her neck, and she turned a complete somersault downhill, while a sudden smashing of underbrush told of the flight of her terrified companions.

We both laughed and called out "dinner" as we sprang down toward her, and in a few minutes she was dressed and hung up by the hind legs on a small ash tree. The entrails and viscera we threw off to one side, after carefully poisoning them from a little bottle of strychnine which I had in my pocket. Almost every cattleman carries poison and neglects no chance of leaving out wolf bait, for the wolves are sources of serious loss to the unfenced and unhoused flocks and herds. In this instance we felt particularly revengeful because it was but a few days since we had lost a fine yearling heifer. The tracks on the hillside where the carcass lay when we found it told the story plainly. The wolves, two in number, had crept up close before being discovered, and had then raced down on the astounded heifer almost before she could get fairly started. One brute had hamstrung her with a snap of his vise-like jaws, and once down, she was torn open in a twinkling.

No sooner was the sun up than a warm west wind began to blow in our faces. The weather had suddenly changed, and within an hour the snow was beginning to thaw and to leave patches of bare ground on the hillsides. We left our coats with our horses and struck off on foot for a group of high buttes cut up by the cedar canyons and gorges, in which we knew the old bucks loved to lie. It was noon before we saw anything more. We lunched at a clear spring—not needing much time, for all we had to do was to drink a draught of icy water and munch a strip of dried venison. Shortly afterward, as we were moving along a hillside with silent caution, we came to a sheer canyon of which the opposite face was broken by little ledges grown up with wind-beaten cedars. As we peeped over the edge, my companion touched my arm and pointed silently to one of the ledges, and instantly I caught the glint of a buck's horns as he lay half behind an old tree trunk. A slight shift of position gave me a fair shot slanting down between his shoulders, and though he struggled to his feet he did not go 50 yards after receiving the bullet.

This was all we could carry. Leading the horses around we packed the buck behind my companion's saddle, and then rode back for the doe, which I put behind mine. But we were not destined to reach home without a slight adventure. When we got to the river we rode boldly on the ice, heedless of the thaw; and about midway there was a sudden, tremendous crash, and men, horses and deer were scrambling together in the water amid slabs of floating ice. However, it was shallow and no worse results followed than some hard work and a chilly bath. But what cared we? We were returning triumphant with our Christmas dinner.

Little Nita's Best Christmas

By WILLIAM ROSSER COBBE

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Nita was just seven years old. She was born on a Christmas day, and this was a Christmas day, too.

This was one reason why so much, so very much pains was taken to make every Christmas a delightful one for her.

Never before had so much been done for her. To be sure, she was older than she was a year ago and could appreciate better what was done for her. Yet somehow she was not nearly so happy as she thought she should be.

Such a glorious Christmas tree stood out in the wide hall of the great mansion in which she lived. It contained such a load of presents for her—almost a roomful she declared to herself, as they were taken down one by one and opened for her inspection and admiration.

Nita was an only child, and this was another reason why her parents made much of the day for her sake. There had been another, but it had died before Nita could remember. She had been told about her dead baby brother so often that it seemed to her that she could recall him and there were times when she felt he was looking at her and wanted to be at her side.

This Christmas day was so long, somehow. She had but just run to Nurse Amy to ask if it were not luncheon time. Not that she was hungry, but she had got so tired of playing by herself. Nursey had said it was only 11 o'clock, and she had thought it was almost night.

What were playthings, anyhow? She had always had them. They couldn't run around the big grounds and play with her at hide and seek as she had seen other children do—as she had done with her cousins, when, as she sometimes did, she visited them in their far away northern home. It was dreadful cold up there—much colder than in her own southland, where one might play outdoors all the year round, but she would be willing to live there, if only she had playmates like other children.

Of course everybody was good. Papa was good, and mamma was good, and nursey, too; but they were so often busy, and they were grown up, too, and couldn't be expected to play games with a little girl.

It would be nicer, she thought, if papa would remove from the country to the city. Then she might play with the neighbors' children.

Nita yawned.

"I'd be willin' to let 'em play with everything I have, and wear my watch some, and ride my pony," she said, magnanimously.

"I do wonder why they don't let me see mamma?" she asked herself frequently. "Here its been about a week since I've seen her, and every time I start upstairs to her room, governess, or nurse, or the doctor push me back with a 'You musn't disturb mamma, for she's sick.' As if I'd disturb my dear, dear mamma for anything in all this world.

"I b'lieve I don't care for toys any more. I guess I'm gettin' too old for them. I b'lieve I'll tell papa to give mine away to some poor children that don't have any."

Here she strode to a mirror, before which she stood and stretched herself to her full little seven-year height.

"I reckon I'll have to grow a heap more before I'm a woman," she sighed, "but, anyway, I'm gettin' tired of Chrismases and birthdays and toys. If I just did have somethin' to amuse me—somebody to play with that isn't clean grown up."

And then this blase child of seven stretched herself out upon the floor and soon was fast asleep.

When she awoke Nurse Amy was standing beside her.

"I reckons yer marmer wants ter see yer, honey," she said, with a smile.

Without questioning, without replying, the little girl sprang to her feet and fairly flew up the broad oaken stairway.

"O mamma," she cried, as she sought to throw herself into that parent's arms.

But gentle hands restrained her and then she was shown something that thrilled her with delight.

"A Christmas present, mamma, and a brother, too. It is my brother that went to heaven?"

"Not that one, dear, but another sent from heaven."

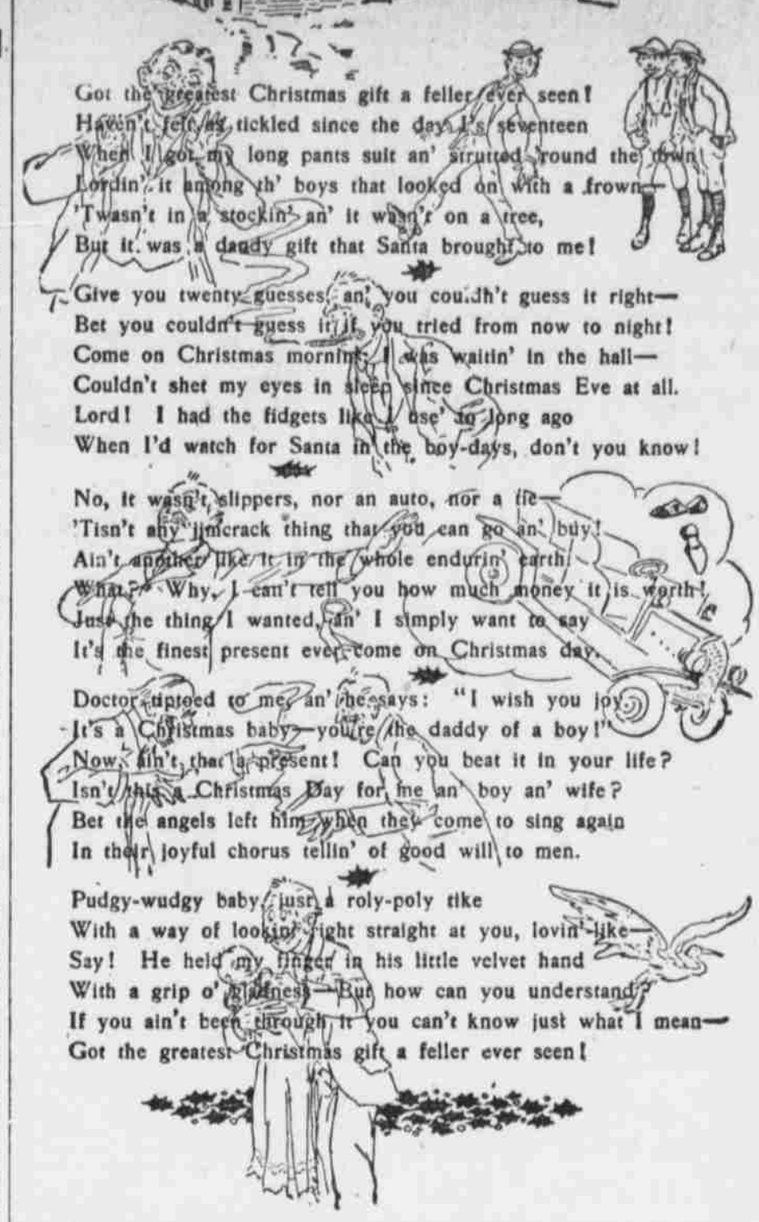
"Give him my presents, mother—all of them. He's worth all of them and more, too. May I hold him, mamma?"

And Nita's heart overflowed with joy when this request was granted her.

"This is God's present, isn't it mamma—Jesus' present. You know you told me how he loved little children. He knows what little girls want better than their mothers and fathers do."

What Santa Brought

By W. D. Nesbit



Got the greatest Christmas gift a feller ever seen!
Haven't felt as tickled since the day I's seventeen
When I got my long pants suit an' strutted 'round the town
Lordin' it among th' boys that looked on with a frown—
'Twasn't in a stockin' an' it wasn't on a tree,
But it was a daudy gift that Santa brought to me!

Give you twenty guesses an' you couldn't guess it right—
Bet you couldn't guess it if you tried from now to night!
Come on Christmas mornin' I was waitin' in the hall—
Couldn't shet my eyes in sleep since Christmas Eve at all.
Lord! I had the fidgets like I use' to long ago
When I'd watch for Santa in the boy-days, don't you know!

No, it wasn't slippers, nor an auto, nor a tie—
'Tisn't any jimcrack thing that you can go an' buy!
Ain't another like it in the whole endurin' earth!
What? Why, I can't tell you how much money it is worth!
Just the thing I wanted, an' I simply want to say
It's the finest present ever come on Christmas day.

Doctor tiptoed to me an' he says: "I wish you joy.
It's a Christmas baby—you're the daddy of a boy!"
Now, ain't that a present! Can you beat it in your life?
Isn't this a Christmas Day for me an' boy an' wife?
Bet the angels left him when they come to sing again
In their joyful chorus tellin' of good will to men.

Pudgy-wudgy baby, just a roly-poly tike
With a way of lookin' right straight at you, lovin'-like—
Say! He held my finger in his little velvet hand
With a grip o' gladness—But how can you understand
If you ain't been through it you can't know just what I mean—
Got the greatest Christmas gift a feller ever seen!

The Charm of Christmas

By Washington Irving

OF all the old festivals that of Christmas awakens the strongest and most heartfelt associations. There is a tone of solemn and sacred feeling that blends with our conviviality, and lifts the spirit to a state of hallowed and elevated enjoyment. The services of the church about this season are extremely tender and inspiring; they dwell on the beautiful story of the origin of our faith, and the pastoral scenes that accompanied its announcement; they gradually increase in fervor and pathos during the season of Advent, until they break forth in full jubilee on the morning that brought peace and good will to men. I do not know a grander effect of music on the moral feelings than to hear the full choir and the pealing organ performing a Christmas anthem in a cathedral, and filling every part of the vast pile with triumphant harmony.

It is a beautiful arrangement also, derived from the days of yore, that this festival, which commemorates the announcement of the religion of peace and love, has been made the season for gathering together closer again those bands of kindred hearts, which the cares and pleasures and sorrows of the world are continually operating to cast loose; of calling back the children of a family, who have launched forth in life and wandered widely asunder, once more to assemble about the paternal hearth—that rallying place of the affections, there to grow young and loving again among mementos of childhood.

There is something in the very season of the year that gives a charm to the festivity of Christmas. At other times we derive a great portion of our pleasures from the mere beauties of nature. Our feelings sally forth and dissipate themselves over the sunny landscape, and we "live abroad and everywhere." The song of the bird, the murmur of the stream, the breathing fragrance of spring, the soft voluptuousness of summer, the golden pomp of autumn; earth, with its mantle of refreshing green, and heaven, with its deep, delicious blue and its cloudy magnificence, all fill us with mute but exquisite delight, and we revel in the luxury of mere sensation. But in the depth of winter, when nature lies despoiled of every charm and wrapped in her shroud of sheeted snow, we turn for our gratifications to moral sources. The dreariness and desolation of our landscape; the short, gloomy days and darksome nights, while they circumscribe our wanderings, shut in our feelings also from rambling abroad, and make us more keenly disposed for the pleasures of the social circle. Our thoughts are more concentrated; our friendly sympathies more aroused. We feel more sensibly the charm of each other's society, and are brought more closely together by dependence on each other for enjoyment. A season when heart calling unto heart.

The pitchy gloom without makes the heart dilate on entering the room filled with the glow and warmth of the evening fire. The ruddy blaze diffuses an artificial summer and sunshine through the room, and light up each countenance with a kindlier welcome. Where does the honest face of hospitality expand into a broader and more cordial smile—where is the shy glance of love more sweetly eloquent—than by the winter fireside? And, as the hollow blast of wintry wind rushes through the hall, clasps the distant door, whistles about the casement, and rumbles down the chimney, what can be more grateful than that feeling of sober and sheltered security with which we look around upon the comfortable chamber and the scene of domestic hilarity?

Amidst the general call to happiness, the bustle of the spirits, and stir of the affections, which prevail at this period, what bosom can remain insensible? It is, indeed, the season of regenerated feeling—the season for kindling not merely the fire of hospitality in the hall, but the genial flame of charity in the heart.

Surely happiness is reflective, like the light of heaven; and every countenance, bright with smiles and glowing with innocent enjoyment, is a mirror transmitting to others the rays of a supreme and ever-shining benevolence. He who can turn churlishly away from contemplating the felicity of his fellow-beings, and can sit down darkling and repining in his loneliness when all around is joyful, may have his moments of strong excitement and selfish gratification, but he wants the genial and social sympathies which constitute the charm of a merry Christmas.

A Decoy.

The minister who had exchanged with Rev. Mr. Talcom was scandalized to see Deacon Snowball in the vestry, after service, deliberately taking a 50-cent piece out of the contribution-box and substituting a dime.

"Brer Snowball," he exclaimed, in horror and amazement, "that's plain dishonest doings!"

We do not know how cheap the seeds of happiness are, or we should scatter them oftener.—Lowell.

It takes a woman to tell a secret and magnify its importance.